Castlemaine Naturalist

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Your Country (box-ironbark) Needs You!

Volunteers are wanted for a 12 month study of the use of hollow-bearing trees by birds in northern and central Victoria.

The study concentrates on the box-ironbark habitat on private land and complements tree and wildlife surveys undertaken by the Department of Conservation & Natural Resources in woodlands on public land.

The box-ironbark forests of northern Victoria have declined grievously over the past 150 years due to land clearing, gold mining, timber utilization and the effects of grazing. Today less than 15% of the original tree cover remains. While nest boxes and artificial hollows have been erected in several areas, these offer only a partial solution as natural hollows provide superior shelter and longevity.

Since 30% of Austrialian bird species breed in tree hollows and there are potentially few suitable hollows in box-ironbark country the information gathered will assist in the management of the remaining old growth and remnant trees.

Volunteer observers and sympathetic land owners are urgently sought for the project. If you are interested please contact Chris Morris or another committee member. "It is quite probable that this will be one of the most important factors in bird conservation over the next few decades".

Contributed by Chris Morris

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne

(Or, A Great Place for a Lunch Break)

In Mid-March Maureen and I were heading to Ventnor, Phillip Island, for a "well-earned" holiday. We planned our lunch stop at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne. Our guest speaker at the October meeting, Dr Phillip Moors, sold us on them, so they were a "must" for a visit.

We were not disappointed, and thoroughly recommend them to all, even after just a lunch break and a short 30 minute (!!!) walk. We took

in part of the Arboretum walk, which took us through wet heathland, tea-tree heathland, woodland and lakes, (just completed and dry) and resulted in the sighting of a Southern Brown Bandicoot, an Echidna and a variety of birdlife (30 species) including a Crested Shrike-tit, 5 honeyeaters, Grey Butcherbird, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Yellow Robin, Rufous Whistler, etc.

There are several other walks of 30 minutes to 2½ hours duration covering six different vegetation areas. Allow yourself plenty of time to check out this great bushland area with excellent picnic, BBQ and toilet facilities.

On Phillip Island

Our trip to Phillip Island in Mid March incorporated many bird-watching trips which resulted in a count of 88 different species, with an overall total trip count of 100 species.

Some of the more unusual sightings to us, or for the area were :- Magpie Goose (Pied), Cape Barren Geese, Australian Gannet, Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, 7 varieties of raptors, 5 varieties of honeyeaters, Rainbow Lorikeet, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (rare on Phillip Is.), as are also Crested Shrike-tits, and Satin Flycatchers (male and female). An Olive Whistler and Varied Sitellas were spotted at Bald Hills reserve, south of Inverloch.

We also had a little time left over for a fish and a swim in the bay!!

Ken and Maureen Dredge.

Swift Parrot Survey

Swift Parrots breed in Tasmania, but move over to the mainland to Victoria and N.S.W. in the winter, where it's distribution centres on the Box-Ironbark communities, where they feed on lerp and winter-flowering eucalypts, particularly Red Ironbark, Mugga Ironbark, White Box, Grey Box and Yellow Gum.

The Swift Parrot has recently been classified as endangered in Victoria. The annual Surveys are being carried out in April and August.

The club is taking part on the Saturday, 27th April, leaving 27 Doveton Street at 10 am for 3 or 4 different locations.

Most of the 250 birds recorded last year were from a single flock in the Warby Ranges.

Our First FNC Campout

During the March long weekend we attended the V.F.N.C. Campout at Portsea, and with 120 others from all over the state we had a great time. Mt Martha FNC were the hosts and they had arranged two days of varied excursions around the Peninsular and three evenings where we enyoyed a shared meal followed by most interesting guest speakers.

The excursions were to Point Nepean National Park, Green's Bush, Bushrangers Bay and Cape Schanck, Fossil Beach and Balcombe Estuary, and Hillview Quarry. There was also a Marine foreshore ramble, a trip to Queenscliff on the Ferry and a Geological Survey.

As you can see there was a great variety of activities to chose from, or you could just sit and enjoy the scenery and the company. The highlight for us was the trip to Point Nepean on the Sunday. Only a certain number of people were allowed on the Peninsula at one time, and the only vehicles allowed are the 'Park Transporters'. We travelled down to the first stop and then walked from there through the Cemetery to the Bayside Beach. As we strolled along the beach we kept a lookout for dolphins (the group the day before had reported seeing quite a few) but we were not as lucky. We then crossed over to Cheviot Hill and gazed down on that now famous beach and out across the Strait. We caught the transporter again to the next stop which was Fort Pearce and Eagles Nest. We spent some time watching the ships coming and going through the Rip. It was marvellous - one way was the Strait and the other the Bay. It was hard to believe that across the other side of the Bay the Grand Prix was in progress.

We saw the largest flock of Red Wattlebirds here that I have ever seen in my life. There were hundreds of them flying up the Peninsular, and then back again.

We walked to Point Nepean. There, some toured the old Fort while others continued 'Rip gazing'. Point Nepean is a place I would recommend for all to see.

The evening speakers were Winty Calder, about her research on the Penimsula vegetation; Ted Davis, about Fossil Beach and Les Wiseman on the revegetation program of Mt Martha quarry area over the last 25 years. Each talk was accompanied by some great slides.

The camp was a great experience and we are now hoping to attend more. There are several throughout the year arranged by various Field Nats clubs. Keep a watch as information will be included in the newsletter as details come to hand. Hope to see you at the next one!

Margaret and Brian Willis

Comparing the Birdlists

We now have several people submitting birdlists to the Magazine, some in the form of a straight list; some with observations of behaviour included; some covering a large area; some a private garden, but each are in a different type of vegetation, topography and rainfall. Sandon, a property of some 40 acres, was cleared and used for farming, but there are areas of trees, mainly box and stringbark, with Yellow Gum on the flats, and the rainfall is relatively low at around 550ml per year. Fryerstown is a higher rainfall area, the soil is largely auriferous, the topography hilly and there is much re-growth forest, mainly box-stringybark with some peppermint, with areas of exotic trees, and weed species such as gorse on the flats. Singletons' on the other hand, is on the edge of Kalimna Park, is a natural bush garden, is on the auriole of "cooked" rocks from the granite of Mt Alexander, has much the same rainfall as Castlemaine, and the vegetation is mainly box-stringybark, with a wealth of shrubs and herbs underneath, and is fairly typical of the surrounding hills of Castlemaine. Parnabys' is a garden at the edge of the bushland south of the Mt Alexander Golf Club.

This all makes for some interesting comparisons between the various lists and it is also interesting to follow the pattern of the seasons.

Ed.

Birds at Singletons, Lawson Parade

White-throated Treecreeper
Restless Flycatcher
Scarlet Robin
Flame Robin
Yellow Robin
Blue Wren
Fuscous Honeyeater
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird
Eastern Spinebill
Spotted Pardalote
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Bronzewing Pigeon
Grey Shrike-thrush
Tawny Frogmouth
Australian Owlet-nightjar
Kookaburra
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
White-winged Chough

Bev. Singleton

Sandon Birds, Feb. '96

Pacific Black Duck
White-faced Heron
Brown Goshawk
Little Eagle
Masked Lapwing
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo
Southern Boobook (h)
Australian Owlet-nightjar (h)

White-throated Tree-creeper
Wren
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Speckled Warbler
Weebill
Brown,
Buff-rumped,
Yellow-rumped and
Striated Thornbills
Red Wattlebird
Yellow-tufted,
Fuscous,
White-plumed and
Brown-headed Honeyeaters
Scarlet Robin,
Eastern Yellow Robin
White-browed Babbler
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher
Magpie-lark
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven
White-winged Chough
Red-Browed Finch
Diamond Firetail
Welcome Swallow

Susanna Starr

Birdwatching at Warburton's Bridge

A highlight of the CFNC calendar is the monthly birdwatching outing with U/3A. The excursion on March 21st was no exception.

Warburton's Bridge, at Glenluce, is one of the best birdwatching spots in the district. It has some varied vegetation, to suit a variety of birds - a beautiful stretch of river with water plants, hillsides with Yellow Box, box-stringybark forest, grassy areas with regenerating eucalypts, and farmland with dead trees. It is a good place to see hawks as they fly along the river in search of prey.

The eucalypts were shedding bark. They are particularly beautiful at this stage with shades of apricot, taupe, light and dark grey, beige, brown and cream. Surprisingly, the Red Gums and Manna Gums had similar colours, and only the rougher bark at the base, the ribbony bark on the branches and the masses of buds enabled the Manna Gums to be readily recognised. The eucalypts look particularly healthy, with an abundance of new leaves.. The Yellow Box were sparsley-leaved during the drought, but are now a dense mass of green.

The River Bottle-brush was in full flower. In some years it has only a few flowers, but this year some of the plants were covered in brushes.

The Blackwoods had a greyish appearance. On closer inspection the colour was due to masses of brown-specked grey buds. 1996 looks as if it will be a wonderful year for wattle blossom.

In the paddock, on the other side of the river, the dead eucalypts stand starkly agains the background of river trees. Most of the time, birds could be seen flying around, or perched in the dead branches - it is not always realised that dead trees are important to animal life.

E.P.

Problems of Supplementary Feeding of Birds

This is an extract from a letter sent to the Conservation Officer, Hugo Phillips, RAOU, by the operators of Emu Tours.

"With regard to large-scale supplementary feeding, we recall some work done by David Paton in the early 80's on the reasons for winter mortality of Red Wattlebirds in Melbourne suburbs. He concluded that birds died from thiamine deficiency caused by a lack of insects in the diet - the birds being induced to stay in the city rather than migrating northwards by the provision of sugary food by householders.....

"There is also some anecdotal evidence that Rainbow Lorikeets are fledging around Sydney with deformed and poorly developed feathers because of the abundankce of sugary food available at feeders, combined with a lack of protien food in the diet of the chicks.

"The main point we would make is that we have reached the stage in our consevation thinking when we should be considering ways of reducing our disturbance of wildlife to a minimum."

Contributed by Chris. Morris

Observations for March

* Flock of Gang Gang Cockatoos by Sandon Church (late Feb). S.S.
* The pair of Southern Boobooks have returned to their winter perch at the Botanic Gardens. S.P.
* A few specimens of Parsons Bands orchids blooming at Expedition Pass - not very prolific this year. S.P.
* In recent weeks the fine specimens of Angophora florabunda (Rough-barked Apple) near the band practice pavillion at the Botanic Gardens have been covered with a profusion of creamy blossom which filled the surrounding area with the delicious smell of honey. S.P.
* A Grey Goshawk with young was sighted at Port Campbell. There has been only a single bird for several years according to local fishermen, but it has mated again this year. K.D.
* White Ibis seen feeding at Harcourt. B.E.
* A Brown Snake seen at close quarters while on the quarry top at Daleys Hill near Fosterville. A wonderful view of the canopy of the trees growing in the quarry is to be had from the top - an excellent opportunity for birdwatching. E.P.

* The general observation was made that there were many snakes around early in the season before New Year.
* There were lots of Pallid Cuckoos calling at Sandon during February. R.W. A lot have been heard over the last couple of years. G.S.
* There was general agreement that there have been few European Wasps around this year. Was the drought the reason? or could there be some other factor?
* The numbers of Pardalotes seem to have declined also. The same thing happened in the 1982 drought, and it took approximately ten years for numbers to build up again. G.S.
* A Crested Shrike-tit bathing in the bird bath at Campbells Creek J.H.
* White-faced Herons have nested at Chewton and raised two young. L.R.
* A pair of Brolgas seen on a swamp on Saligaria Road, near Campbelltown. L.R.
* A Tuan seen often in Fryers Road, Chewton over the past two or three months. It was seen stalking and catching a blackbird on one occasion. L.R.
* Fifteen Crested Grebes were seen on Barkers Creek Reservoir, North Harcourt. C.M.
* The black and white Blackbird seems to have taken up residence in Doveton Street. (This bird was first spotted some 18 months ago on the creek near Thomas Street.) E.P.
* Lots of swifts were spotted overhead towards the end of the month, flying randomly and high up. G.B.
* A line up - literally - of four large Red-backs were found at 11 o'clock one night on the front verandah in Kennedy Street. They were all sitting in a line in their own webs. Very unwise of them as they have come to a sticky end. B.M.
* After just one Grey Currawong coming to the house for quite some time, there are now six. J.H.
* A pair of Little Eagles sean often at lunchtime soaring over the orchard where he is working in Harcourt. G.B. Two have been seen soaring an calling at Norward Hill. J.H.
* A lyrebird seen in Kinglake National Park. J.H.
* At least three species of frogs calling in the rain at North Castlemaine. R.M.

New Members

Welcome back to the club Barry and Bev Singleton, Peggy Shaw and Enid Hall.

Eltham Copper Butterflies.

The block of land adjoining Harcuses' in Odgers Road has been bought by the Commissioners and is now part of the Gardens. It should prove to be a buffer against weeds and will greatly help to protect the Eltham Copper Butterfly area.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.
General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street. .

Fri Apr 12. **Introduction to Beetles.**Speaker is Peter Kelly
Sat April 13 **Lanacoorie Res. Birdwatching.** Leaders K. Turner, C. Morris.
Thurs April 18. **U3A/FNC Birdwatching.** Meet Cont. Ed. car Park 9.30 am.
** Sat April 27 **Swift Parrot Survey** Meet at 27 Doveton St. at 10 am. Details inside.
Fri May 10 **Waders in Siberia** Speaker is Mike Weston.
Sat May 11 **Terrick Terrick** All day excursion.
Fri June 14 **Marilyn Sprague, "Seed collection and propagation", and "Rehabilitation of mined areas".**
Sat June 15 **Falls at Malmsbury** on private property. Leader, B. Maund.
Fri July 12 **Some Birds of the Castlemaine district.** Program by Club members, Chris. Morris, George Broadway, Ern Perkins, Brenda Envall, Rita Mills, Kay Turner and Maggie Oliver, Susanna Starr and Bob Webb.
Sat Dec. 14. **Discovery walk** from the Shire boundary to Barringhup along the Carisbrook/Baringhup road, (approx 5-6 km).

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Committee: C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis (Interim Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner (Prog.), R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge.

Meetings:-
General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at **Continuing Education, Templeton St.** at 8 pm.
Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. **All Members are invited to attend.**

Subscriptions - 1996
Ordinary Membership: single $14 Family $20
Pensioner/Student: Single $10 Family $16.
Supporting $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.